

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Re: Letter on Summer Fellowship experience

August 24, 2015

Dan,

My summer experience at Legal Aid Justice Center was phenomenal. As I enter my 2L year, I feel completely different from the person I was when I left for the summer as a 1L. My experience with the attorneys and clients at Legal Aid Justice Center refined my ambition to pursue a career in public interest, specifically poverty law.

One client in particular solidified my decision to continue in the field of poverty law. For the purpose of this story and to protect the client's identity, we will call her Patsy. Patsy was a tenant at a mobile home park we worked with (and continue to work with as we represent tenants in a federal suit against the City of Richmond).

The nature of her case was a tenants-assertion claim. Patsy and her husband had notified their landlord several times that their electricity output was not emitting the adequate voltage but the landlord failed to take action. Without 220 voltz, the electricity would not sustain any home appliances. For months, Patsy's family used a camp stove to cook, window-unit air conditioning and other subpar alternatives to appliances.

Patsy and her family lived far below the poverty line and thus did not have regular transportation. Each court appearance, I would pick her up and drive her to court, prepping her on the way. She was not like other clients I worked with. Unfortunately, many of the clients at Legal Aid are clients we have represented multiple times and they often forget to thank you or show their appreciation since they are accustomed to our work. Patsy thanked me every time I dropped her off at home, with tears in her eyes. Sometimes she would say a prayer for me before getting out of the car.

Patsy's outward expressions of gratitude highlighted the differences between my experience her own. I could not imagine being reduced to tears because someone offered me a ride. To her, it was a great gesture of kindness. Patsy is not the only grateful, in-need client I worked with this summer but she certainly had the largest impact on me. Her situation and warrior attitude defined for me how badly attorneys are needed in the field of poverty law. If attorneys like those of Legal Aid did not step up and do this hard, but meaningful, work - people like Patsy would fly under the radar and continue to suffer in their situation.

Thank you very much for providing the financial means for me to take an unpaid job to work for a great organization with such special clients. This summer was truly a life-changing experience that will continue to shape my dreams and perspectives of the legal field.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessi Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessi Wright